Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Testimony of Donna M. Curran, Development Director
Discovery Museum and Planetarium, Bridgeport, CT
Wednesday, February, 17, 2010

Good evening, **Sen. Harp, Rep. Geragosian, Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee:**

Let me begin by thanking you for the hard-fought support you have delivered to the thousands of children and teachers we serve. You have helped us immeasurably, and words are not adequate to the task of thanking you properly.

In 1937, the idea for a children's museum was born in the basement of Bridgeport library. The purpose of the museum was to benefit the children of Bridgeport and provide education in arts, science and industry.

In 1962, after years of outgrowing various venues, our permanent facility was opened on Park Avenue. In 2012 we will be celebrating 50 years of delighting and educating 100's of thousands of visitors, adults and children, and fulfilling a mission inaugurated more than 73 years earlier.

Over those years, that mission has evolved into a laser focused assault on attacking science illiteracy noted in a 1983 national report, "A Nation at Risk," and affirmed by Thomas Friedman in a 2009 *New York Times* column. If we had addressed the science and math deficiencies noted 25 years ago, the U. S. would have an additional $2.3 trillion in GDP, and our Latino and African-American students would be better trained and better prepared to compete on an international level.

Thomas Friedman concludes because the U.S. ignored the science achievement gap, 'we are no longer a nation at risk; we are now a nation in decline...Even children in our modern, suburban schools lag their international peers."

Further, according to **2008 CONNCAN** Report, "Already the highest in the country (50th out of 50 states), Connecticut's achievement gap increased...Fifth and eight graders...performed worse in science than in reading, writing and math."

At Discovery Museum, we address these science literacy and achievement gaps every day by providing science programming to our visitors, schoolchildren and in classrooms every day:

- Our programs meet State Department of Education curriculum standards to improve benchmark test scores. And we have become a regional resource for our state's teachers;
- Our programs begin with the youngest—Pre-K—to take advantage of a child's natural sense of wonder and curiosity;
- Our programs include the youngest as it has been quantified in a Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis study, that children who receive early childhood education are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and hold a job—for every $1 invested; there is a $16 IRR;

- Our programs revolve around hands-on, mind-on, interactive demonstrations, again using a technique of engaging as a pathway to educating;
- Our programs are based on the scientific method so our children learn how to be critical thinkers and therby informed voters and consumers;
- Our Bridgeport outreach is significant—we are in 13 schools to deliver after-school science education to 350 students every day in a safe and secure environment;
- Our Bridgeport outreach includes our staff going into Bridgeport classrooms as many as 25 times in one week to support teachers and provide science enrichment for their students.

We are happy to report construction has begun on the Discovery Science Magnet School, a unique national model partnering a school, a science museum, and a university. When completely filled, 500 pre-K-8 students will be enrolled; 70% from Bridgeport; 30% from the suburbs. We at Discovery see this school as an affirmation of the significant service we deliver to the educational community as well as to our visitors. Yet, Discovery, while an integral player in the *new* magnet school partnership, is not scheduled to receive any *new* funding to upgrade and enhance its existing facility.

We receive no federal or local support. This is not the time to cut our funding further. We have reduced our staff, cut our salaries 10%, and have done with less.

So you can see the sad irony, our budget is being cut even as the need and demand for our mission grows.

The President of the United States has been eloquent and consistent in his belief that science and technology are the keys for our country, our children, to get ahead in an increasingly competitive, global economy. His most recent STEM initiative (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) has been the core of our mission for almost 50 years!

What is OPPORTUNITY COST? It is the cost of the Foregone Alternative.

It's a key economic principle that accountants don't have to deal with—but thoughtful legislators do.

Opportunity cost acknowledges that attractive choices compete for limited resources. If we choose to spend there, we can't always spend here.

Has anyone done the societal math for the opportunity cost of eradicating positive, educational influences in the lives of those children who need it most and have few--if any--*positive* alternatives? Has anyone stopped to calculate the opportunity cost of that one imagination that remains uninspired? Has anyone calculated the cost of busloads of children who will not experience the spark of discovery that was their due and was to fuel them intellectually for a lifetime? I have a feeling the opportunity cost will be much, much greater than the dollars saved by further mitigation.

Don't eliminate the engines that generated $9 billion tourism revenue and 110,000 jobs in 2008. Don't push our children further down the economic scale trying to fill a budgetary hole.

We cannot gamble with our children's minds or the quality of their futures. And please remember, most importantly, only if *we* speak, will *their* voices be heard.